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# SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE PRESENT DUTY OF THE CHURCH

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*In our opinion this article is one of the most discriminating catalogues of social duties yet put forth. We wish that every pastor could preach at least three sermons along the line of thought that Dr. Holt has here set forth.*

## **Our Social Platform**

All communities are built on force and fear or on justice and faith.

Communities built on force and fear ultimately disintegrate through social anarchy.

Social faith and trust can only be built upon social justice.

Giving of justice builds social faith and makes permanent community life possible.

Christians are those who give justice and give it first and thus become the creators of social faith and good will.

Jesus sets before us the ideal of being sons of our Father in Heaven who sends his rain on the just and the unjust and causes his sun to shine on the evil and the good.

His plan for the redemption of society looked forward to the creation of brotherly men who loved justice enough to be willing to give it in thought as well as in deed and to give it even sacrificially where the reward to be had was reaped by those who come after rather than by those who gave justice.

The critical opportunity for the Christian to reveal his purpose to do justice is found in his human vocation which comes to him out of the com-

munity life in which he lives. The crucial test of his Christian ethics is found in his vocational ethics. No man can be good apart from a vocation and no kind of goodness can be offered as a substitute for righteousness in one's earthly vocation.

Christian churches are social groups of people who have heard the call to the Christian vocation which comes from Jesus Christ and are pledged to the working out of social justice in the human vocations which come to them out of the communities in which they live. As Christians they are banded together for the task of promoting social justice in themselves and in others.

## **Our Duty as Individual Christians**

Our first duty as individual Christians is to become thoroughly conscious of the demands which arise out of our Christianity that we give social justice. Religion is always in danger of offering something less than social justice as its obligation which it renders to society. As Christians we have the task of fighting the sin of misplaced emphasis in religion. The development of a Christian conscience which is conscientious about things which are important and not about issues which are petty is the

first charge upon Christians in all social progress.

Our second duty as individual Christians is to work out programs for social justice in the social situations of which we are a part. We must be interested in social and vocational ethics because we see in these ethical codes the specific application of Christian principles to social situations. Decalogues, law codes, social creeds, professional ethics, the customs of society, are the itemizing of the general ethical principles which maintain in a generation. As Christians we must see that these codes are the expression of general Christian principles. Business and professional men are in and through their business and professions as responsible for the building of the Kingdom of God as is the minister in his profession.

Our third duty as individual Christians is to become thoroughly conscious of our community situations. Communities differ largely in the fact that in different communities vocations of different types predominate. This creates different problems in vocational ethics and social righteousness. No group of Christians can escape the obligation of understanding their own community life. In general communities are divided into the following classes, determined more or less by the predominance in these communities of certain vocational groups: (1) the rural community; (2) the trade center; (3) the village community; (4) the industrial community; (5) the city community; (6) the suburban community; (7) the college community; (8) the resort community. These various communities present different types of prob-

lems in social righteousness and the Christians who are seeking social righteousness in these communities should become conscious of their problems. Their portion of the Kingdom of God on earth is the community in which they are living. It must become God's community on earth.

### **Our Duties as Christians Organized in Churches**

As Christians we have duties as individuals, but we also have duties as organized groups. We must become conscious of our resources and obligations in our corporate capacity as members of churches.

Our first duty as a church is to become acquainted with our *resources* for social ministration. We must understand the contributions which we can make to a community when we call that community together in meetings for public worship, public discussion, festivals, and community recreation. These are instrumentalities for the development of a community conscience and a common mind which are at the disposal of no other institution in such a degree as possessed by the church. We must understand that in the experience of the Hebrew people and in Christian history we have a great laboratory of social experience and out of this laboratory we can bring wisdom which is of great value to the social experience of the present. We must understand our resources of social fellowship. The fundamental crisis in democracy is at the point where fellowship is extended or denied. We must understand the contribution which we make to social righteousness when we bring people together in Christian

fellowship. Finally we must understand our resources of mercy upon which the church can draw in extending helpfulness in case of need. The church is committed to the giving of mercy as well as justice and possesses resources of mercy in the ability of those who constitute its membership.

Our second duty as a church is to work out *methods* of social service which are adapted to the needs of the various communities in which the church must live. These methods will concern first of all the types of service for public worship. True public worship is socially conditioned. Stilted adherence to one type of public worship for all communities is the height of folly. As churches we must provide the type of worship which will accomplish the purpose of public worship. In some communities we will hold union services; in some we will hold shop meetings; on occasions we will hold patriotic services, services in the interest of education, public health, public morals, and all the vital matters which concern community welfare.

Not only must there be adaptation in matters of public worship, but there must be adaptation to social situations in moral and religious education. True moral and religious education is socially conditioned. The same type of moral education ought not to be offered to a rural community which is offered to a factory community. Certain problems of social ethics exist for all communities but all communities have special problems which most distinctly determine the type of religious and moral education which should be offered in those communities. Rural-life courses should be

offered in rural communities, student-life courses in college communities, courses in the ethics of industry should be offered in industrial communities.

The adaptation to community conditions extends also to the technique of social fellowship. Christian fellowship is socially conditioned. Not to recognize this is to fail utterly or only partially to succeed. Social fellowship must develop a different method in almost every community. Young people's socials, church picnics, boys' camps, girls' camps, open-house programs, will express social fellowship in an entirely different way in different communities. There must be adaptation based on a knowledge of conditions.

Likewise the church in its ministrations of mercy must take account of the fact that kindness is always socially conditioned. An act of mercy in one community is not necessarily an act of mercy in another community. The church is probably the greatest single agent in binding up the wounds of a suffering humanity and it ought to be willing to pay the price of an accurate knowledge of the methods of kindness which it seeks to use. Hospitals, old folks' homes, church loan funds, and flower guilds ought not to be indiscriminately distributed.

### **Developing Our Christian Conscience**

That we as Christians and as churches may meet the demands of the hour we must neglect no opportunity for the culture of our Christian conscience. The issue will not be met by any easy-going trust on our part. We must turn our attention with deep seriousness to the study of that type of literature which

does justice to the social implications of our religious traditions. The directors of this new piety will be men like Rauschenbusch, Gladden, Taylor, Wallis, and Kent. No longer may we look with scorn upon the merely moral man. Christian ethics which does not stop short of social ethics must become the common property of every child in the Sunday school. A plan must be devised for the teaching of social justice to all the young people of the nation. Thrift,

temperance, and industry must be taught in Sunday school and day school. Community studies must be made which will help both the church and the individual Christians to know their community. The church must institute a new set of Holy Days, comparable to the ancient system taught by the Catholic church, but based not on the needs of individual character so much as on the need of bringing people together to consider issues vital to their welfare.

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## GETHSEMANE

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The agony of Gethsemane is stranger than the agony of the cross. The church from earliest times has seen in the cross the culmination of the atonement. It is "the cross" that Paul and all the apostles emphasize. So far as I remember no one of the early Fathers ever spoke of the agony of the Garden as a crisis in the life of Jesus or in the history of salvation. Modern scholars however are unanimous in recognizing a crisis here, though no one seems to understand its meaning. The parallel between this experience and the struggle in the wilderness at the beginning of Christ's ministry is plain. This was shorter, but even more intense; was this also a temptation? If so, in what did the temptation consist?

Most clear thinkers see that it could not have been merely a shrinking from

physical death. The *Jewish Encyclopedia*, naturally, accepts this coarse and easy explanation, and therefore argues the weakness and imperfection of Jesus; but this makes Jesus too weak and too cowardly. This theory is not credible even to skeptics. Is the servant so much greater than his lord? Shall one apostle be beheaded, and another smothered in boiling oil, and another ask to be crucified head downward, and all these walk up to their death shouting happy while the Master, to whom they ascribe their courage and joy, faints and cries at the approach of death? It is impossible. It is inconsistent with all the heroic past of this serene man of Nazareth. Modern psychology is against it. That this calm and wise teacher, who has in a hundred ways dared death during his life, and who has